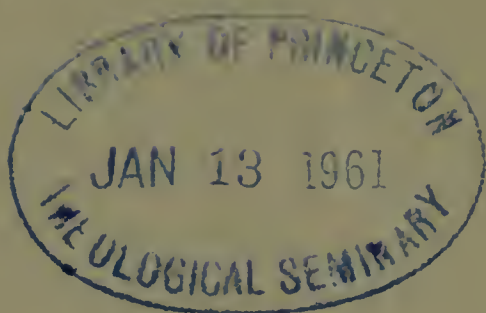


Alfred W. Anthony

The Higher Criticism
in the New Testament

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THE
Higher Criticism

IN THE
New Testament

BY

ALFRED WILLIAMS ✓ ANTHONY

Professor in Cobb Divinity School

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✓

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Lewiston, Me.

A. W. A.

THE HIGHER CRITICISM

DEFINITION

This designation is unfortunate. Neither member of the term is free from objection. The word "criticism" is so commonly used to indicate fault-finding, that the first suggestion is that of censure and destructiveness. And the word "higher" carries at the outset to many minds the assumption of superiority, if not of arrogance. But the study is neither destructive nor arrogant.

The better designation is : *The Historical Method of Biblical Study*.

The name "Higher Criticism" originated in Germany. There it is used in distinction to "Lower Criticism." There criticism is thought of as the calm, impartial act of judging. The Lower Criticism is concerned wholly with the task of determining, among many variations in reading, what is the correct text of a document. It seeks nothing but to ascertain from a comparison of manuscripts the correct reading. That involves

the patient, painstaking task of examining, noting, judging each word and each letter and each mark. That is Lower Criticism.

The Higher Criticism is of no greater importance. It simply deals with questions of a wider scope and broader application. When a text has been determined, then the Higher Criticism undertakes to answer the questions: Who wrote it? When and where did he write? For whom did he write? What is his meaning and message? and subjects of a similar import.

WHAT IT INVOLVES

The Higher Criticism includes within its province the following subordinate branches of Biblical study.

1. *Canonicity.*

Canonicity inquires into the times, processes, and reasons for the collection into a single volume of the books which we know as the Old Testament and the New Testament. When were the thirty-nine documents in the Old Testament and the twenty-seven in the New Testament brought together? Was the process gradual or instantaneous? By what authority was the

inclusion of some books and the exclusion of others allowed? What were the reasons for selection? — the recognition of apostolic authorship? or the perception of moral and spiritual excellence? or some other reason?

Roman Catholics have received into their canon of Scripture certain books between the Old Testament and the New, which Protestants term apocryphal and do not accept. Which is right? This is for Higher Criticism to determine.

Some scholars object to the presence in the canon of some books now acknowledged canonical by Protestants. Martin Luther called the Epistle of James “a right strawy” epistle, because it did not teach Christ to his satisfaction. Some scholars object notably to the Second Epistle of Peter; others to the three Pastoral Epistles of Paul, and others raise objections to the Fourth Gospel. These are problems for the Higher Criticism.

II. *Introduction.*

The term “Introduction,” in the technical sense of a theological discipline, is of German importation. It applies to a thorough-going investigation of all that needs to

be known for the complete understanding of a book. It is not superficial, as the word in the popular sense might imply. It includes a treatment of the following subjects :

1. The genuineness of the book. Genuineness relates to authorship, and investigates the question, Did the person, whose name the book bears, really write the book ? For illustration the Epistle to the Hebrews may be cited. For many centuries this has been ascribed to Paul ; but modern scholars are convinced that Paul could not have written it, the structure, style, and teaching differ so widely from the other epistles which were undoubtedly written by Paul. Then, too, it is found that the Christians of the second and third centuries did not know surely who wrote the book. Origen declared, " Who wrote the book, God only knows."

But the question of genuineness is distinct from the question of canonicity. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Barnabas, or Luke, or Clement, or some unknown person wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews,—even Priscilla, as recently suggested by Professor Harnack,—it remains in the canon.

2. The author of the book. When the authorship has been determined, then the life of the author needs to be known. From his ancestry, his training and education, his social, political, and religious environment, facts may be gleaned which will explain the meaning of the author's writing. Paul's home at Tarsus, his tuition at the feet of Gamaliel, his strict Phariseeism, and his firmly inculcated rabbinical rules of reasoning must be borne in mind in order to understand the man and his message.

3. The date and place of composition. In the case of an epistle allusions to past movements and experiences and to prospective plans cannot be understood unless the circumstances are known in the midst of which the author writes. Recognizing that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans from Corinth, the student can then understand the references to the benevolence of "them of Macedonia and Achaia," and the apostle's purpose to go unto Jerusalem, and subsequently visit Rome on his way to Spain. The historical setting of any document assists in making plain its meaning, and in some instances without this historical setting the meaning is wholly lost.

4. The readers of the book. Most authors address a definite constituency. Letter writers particularly have in mind definite readers in specific circumstances, and appeal to clearly recognized conceptions and conditions. The epistles to the Corinthians and to the Galatians differ widely because the persons addressed differ widely. When one considers that the Thessalonian Christians were simple, humble folk recently converted from heathenism, one will be kept from the ridiculous folly of supposing that in writing to them about a "man of sin," for a time "restrained" and then to "be revealed," Paul referred to Napoleon Bonaparte, or to a profligate woman apotheosized in the French Revolution, or to the Pope, or to Martin Luther himself, as Roman Catholics have sometimes maintained. A document is framed, usually, within the scope of the readers' comprehension.

5. An analysis of the contents of the book. Under the head of Introduction it is legitimate to inquire: What is the author writing about? What is his object in writing? What peculiarities of style, or statement, or teaching does he indulge in? In

this connection, however, the investigation relates chiefly to literary form, or historical allusion.

6. A historical review of the criticism of the book is, also, frequently presented in works on Introduction. The science of criticism is a growth. Slowly have its problems been discovered, and still more slowly are solutions worked out. No one man professes to have attained the final goal. He builds on others ; he interprets others ; often he differs from others ; usually he acknowledges that he is contributing, though but a little, to the opportunities of others who will accomplish more than he. And, so, he puts his work in line with what has been done before and may be done after him.

These are directions in which the historical method of Biblical study, using the technical department of Introduction, makes investigations.

III. *Biblical Theology.*

Many Christians, who have read their Bibles for years, do not know that differences exist within the compass of the New Testament books,—differences in conception, differences in doctrine, and differences in the

delineation of the one common Lord, the Christ. But the differences are there, and careful scholarship has long taken note of them. Based on this recognition of characteristic differences in the point of view and the doctrinal conclusions of the writers of the New Testament, an entirely separate department of theological learning has become known in recent years, the department of Biblical Theology.

We are familiar with Systematic Theology and Dogmatic Theology. We do not always make a distinction between the terms, but a distinction properly exists. Systematic Theology takes its point of view with God, with external, outside truth, to see the parts and the whole in mutual relations ; it employs as sources all knowledge, both from science and revelation. Dogmatic Theology uses the same materials but takes its stand more by the side of the church, to vindicate and justify what she believes and proclaims ; it is more explanatory and apologetic in character.

Biblical Theology resorts wholly to the Bible, not to cite and quote specific texts, not with any assumption that the Bible is the

only source of information and the only court of appeal, but to discover what it teaches part by part, book by book, author by author. It recognizes personalities ; it acknowledges distinctions, individualities, peculiarities both of men and periods and circumstances ; it gives heed to times of composition, to chronological arrangements and relations, and to stages of development and growth.

Biblical Theology recognizes distinct types of doctrine and teaching within the compass of the two Testaments, and speaks confidently of a Pauline theology and a Johanne theology, and of "the teaching of Jesus" as distinct from all.

The Higher Criticism has prompted the careful scholarship which has detected these minute yet actual differences.

IV. *Comparative Religion.*

The historical method of Biblical study attempts to put all religions into their proper relations. Christianity is the flower of Judaism ; Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and has become the world's Saviour. But Judaism was not an isolated faith, as many of us have so long and so erroneously sup-

posed. The history of Israel was not cut off from all other history. The Hebrews were a small people, occupying a minor place in the world's commerce and politics, but they were a religious people ; and all about them were greater and more powerful peoples, each with its religion. These great peoples and these powerful religions influenced Israel. When from excavations and explorations, from tablets and inscriptions, we learn what the Egyptians, the Hittites, the Phœnicians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians believed and taught and accomplished, then we the better know the origin, the meaning, and the distinctiveness of Israel's faith and Israel's Messiah.

The story of creation, the narrative of the flood, accounts of Semitic migrations and movements are found in the literature of more than one people ; to understand the story in one we must know it in all. Then, too, interpretation must often wait upon this comparative study of religion, before it can intelligently accomplish its tasks. Notably is this necessary in such subjects as demonology, diabolology, angelology, and eschatology.

V. *Archeology.*

The pick and the spade are rendering great service to the critical study of the Bible. Centers of dense population and of peculiar associations have undergone radical changes during the lapse of centuries. While the peoples and the customs of oriental countries do not change rapidly, while the mountains and the valleys in most instances remain unaltered, yet cities rise and fall, sites of towns and villages disappear, buildings crumble, localities are abandoned, and geography, so far as occupation and nomenclature are concerned, entirely changes many times within the compass of twenty centuries.

Jerusalem, the Holy City, does not exist as in David's day, nor as in the time of Christ. No city in the world has been battered by seige and assault more than this. Jesus predicted that of the fair stones in the temple walls not one would be left upon another. Within forty years of the time when the words were spoken the city was destroyed by the Romans, and then for half a century was given over to bats and beasts. It has been rebuilt and repeatedly

destroyed. The surface of the ground of Jesus' day is in some places fifty feet beneath the surface to-day, buried by the ruins and the rubbish of the centuries. And in a similar way have other cities suffered, while some of them have never been rebuilt and their very sites are totally forgotten and unknown.

Patiently the explorer and excavator pick up clue after clue, here a stone, an inscription, a piece of pottery ; then a wall, a column, a corner ; there an outline, and then an entire foundation ; and at length we learn the location of towns and edifices, and are enabled in consequence to understand the record of journeys and movements and battles with which the story of Scripture is burdened.

Most of these archeological enterprises are inspired by the Higher Criticism, and the results are seized, systematized, and assimilated by that same Higher Criticism for the historical understanding and the historical interpretation of the Bible.

DOCTRINES AFFECTED BY THE HIGHER
CRITICISM1. *The Inspiration of Scripture.*

I think it fair to say plainly that under the influence of the historical method of Biblical study the old extravagant doctrine of inspiration has gone, never to return. So soon as we inquire respecting the author of a book of the Bible, his nativity, his education, his theological conceptions, or any of his peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, we have necessarily abandoned the view that God is the only, or even the responsible, author of the book ; we recognize the fact that a man wrote it and that in writing it his human qualities were not extinguished or held in abeyance. We treat the book as a human document ; we study it as we study other human documents ; we subject it to the same literary and historical tests which we apply to other books. Our historical method is really a study of the human element,—not of the divine,—and a recognition that the human element persists.

And yet the Higher Criticism recognizes inspiration. It is only the old theory of mechanical inspiration which is shattered.

Scripture, when compared with other books, is found to rise incomparably superior to them all ; when tested as other books are tested, it reveals qualities which they do not possess ; when the human element alone is studied, yet there remains a residuum which is not found in other writings ; when subjected to the regimen of the historical discipline, its permanent and, I may say, almost eternal qualities appear.

Though Inspiration be recognized as existing, yet the difficulty of defining it remains. Higher Criticism does not define Inspiration categorically ; it defines it only descriptively. That degree of difference which marks the Bible off from other books, that is Inspiration ; that overplus of excellence, of power, of ethical and spiritual import, *that* is Inspiration.

Such a definition will not satisfy many people ; but this, I think, is all that the Higher Criticism is at present prepared to give. The critics themselves are not satisfied. They recognize the inadequacy, but up to the present time they have arrived at no unanimity of definition. Upon this task

they still are working, trying to so limit the term as to be inclusive of, and consistent with, all the known facts.

II. *The Inerrancy of Scripture.*

In the past, antagonists have contended bitterly respecting the errancy or inerrancy of Scripture. With the Higher Critics there is no such controversy. They confess at once that there are many inaccuracies of statement in the Bible.

According to the best text, Mark begins his Gospel with a quotation from, as he says, the Prophet Isaiah,—“as it is written in the prophet Isaiah,”—but the first third of his quotation is from Malachi and not from Isaiah at all; the remaining two-thirds are from Isaiah. Matthew states that the Holy Family, returning from Egypt, went and lived in Nazareth, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.” But there is no place in any prophet, so far as known to us, where this was spoken. Luke refers to the enrolment, which took place at the time of the birth of Jesus, as taking place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. But according to secular annalists Quirinius

was governor ten years later. Which is right, Luke, unsupported, or the other authorities ?

It is not needful to multiply instances. The difficulty of reconciling statements and of harmonizing parallel passages has been long recognized and is at length frankly acknowledged. But with this acknowledgment the Higher Criticism has but the more obviously emphasized the distinctive character of the Bible : it is not a text-book on science, nor a treatise on grammatical and rhetorical precision ; it is not characterized with mathematical and statistical conciseness nor inflexible accuracy ; it is a book of religious revelation, with a message of ethical and spiritual warning and appeal. Men need not go to it for their science, their history, their politics, nor their literature, —though, within proper limits, they may find something of all,—but they must go to it alone for instruction in religious faith and practice, an instruction to be drawn from the ethical and spiritual qualities of the record which will speak to their souls.

III. *The Seat of Authority in Religion has been Shifted.*

Three sources of authority in religion have usually been recognized: the Church, the Bible, and Reason. Protestants have accepted the second, for three obvious considerations:

1. They thought this was Martin Luther's conclusion. But in this they were mistaken. Luther, while not professing the Higher Criticism, was nevertheless an independent critic. He did not accept all of the books of the Bible, nor all of the statements of the Bible as binding upon him or upon the church which he would lead out to liberty. He knew there were laws of life and conscience greater than mere statement. By these laws he would test the letter. If the letter and the statement did not reveal to him Christ, he argued that they belonged to some past time and were not for him. So reason, back of the Bible, tested the Bible and was the ultimate authority for him.

2. In the reaction from an infallible pope the pendulum swung naturally enough to another extreme, that of an infallible book. But reactions are always liable to exaggera-

tion. To make a book, which is the product of men, infallible, is but to shift the dogma of infallibility back to those men who wrote the book.

3. Without the study which has now been put upon the Bible the former theory of inspiration held, and with this theory it was but logical to exalt the phrase to the throne of authority. It was not then seen, as history has since proven, that this could be but a theory merely and never be realized in practice. The experience of Protestantism, divided into its many sects, amply proves that the Bible is not an authority, however much revered, for men interpret for themselves and think for themselves, and thereby make their own reason the source of appeal in determining what the Bible says.

The Higher Criticism consistently recognizes the supremacy of Reason. It does not surrender to Rationalism,—that would be to deny the supernatural and the miraculous,—but it affirms that all these declarations and claims concerning supernatural occurrences must be investigated by historical tests in an open-minded, judicial spirit.

But when called upon to pronounce finally upon authority, it is perplexed whether to make private judgment the sole authority, or that judgment confirmed by the common opinion of others, or the consensus of Christian scholarship, which sometimes is properly called "the Christian Consciousness."

But in some form, Reason more and more is recognized, under the direction of the Higher Criticism, as occupying the authoritative place in the final court of appeal.

THE GAINS RESULTING FROM THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

In the midst of the transitions involved in this method of study, to many observers losses alone appear. But there are gains no less real, among which I name the following :

I. *Reverence for Fact.*

Mere opinion, whether it be the hasty conclusions of unenlightened ignorance or the declarations of a reverent and venerable antiquity, is no longer accepted with credence. Men seek fact as an aid and guide to truth. This is the present animus and motive of the entire historical method of

study. So soon as the facts have been ascertained, then men are ready to rewrite their books and reconstruct their theologies.

When haste is carefully guarded against, when crude conclusions are sedulously avoided, when indeed the facts have fully and finally been ascertained, then surely allegiance to facts, hearty and complete, is the bounden duty of every intelligent and conscientious man.

The Higher Criticism by its very genius is developing this reverence for fact. I make the statement, although aware that one school of theological thought to-day, known as the Ritschlian,—itself including many of the most eminent Higher Critics,—yet teaches its disciples to be content with subjective impressions and experiences, declaring, in substance, “We know things not as they are in themselves, but as they are for us.” This school of thought, however, while attractive to many, who find the search for truth baffling, does not represent the legitimate result of the historical method of Bible study. That method, however much perplexed and baffled, nevertheless logically and consistently points to and

prophecies of the goal, the ascertainment of fact, and the recognition of truth.

II. *The Doctrine of the Immanence of God.*

The historical method of Biblical study emphasizes the doctrine, set in motion by modern evolutionary science as accepted by theists, that God is now and always has been actually present in the world, by his presence and power sustaining all things that exist.

The Higher Criticism in its legitimate conclusions declares that as God has been in relation to men so is he to-day; that we may understand the present by the past, and likewise interpret past processes and experiences through an understanding of the processes and experiences of to-day; that revelation has not ceased; that God is still near his people seeking to guide, enlighten, and bless. In past times he may have used kindergarten methods,—though this is the question for historical investigation and testing, whether his methods varied, or the people then were but kindergarten pupils with the comprehension which would objectify and externalize the more spiritual methods which we to-day observe.

God is with us to-day ; God's methods are uniform and consistent : this is one of the conclusions of the Higher Criticism.

III. *The Fact of Development among God's People is Taught by the Higher Criticism.*

In this modern spirit a man may write of " the spiritual development of Paul." We recognize that the apostles grew, expanded, unfolded under the influence of their Master, and after his departure, by frequent accretions, became at length transformed from narrow, provincial Jews into conscious lovers of the race, into reformers and propagandists whose stage of action was the world.

We have long seen obviously that there was a vast progress in doctrine and spirit among the Jews from the time of Moses until the time of the later prophets, and a still greater difference between the religious conceptions of the Old Testament and those of the New, but now we are prepared to behold this process of development in finer details, in limited periods, in individuals, and, also, continuing consecutively from Biblical times down to our own day.

There may be a danger in applying the

principle too rigidly, men may err in thinking the evolutionary principle will prevail without any manifestations of extraordinary power and advancement, but yet the recognition of the principle is a gain for the proper understanding of God's dealings with men, both in the past and the present day.

IV. To speak now of *the modified view of the supernatural*, which the Higher Criticism has introduced, is not to name a distinct gain, so much as one already involved. A recognition of the divine presence amongst men is a recognition that the supernatural is so near at hand that those occurrences which we account natural are really manifestations of the supernatural; the natural and the supernatural tend to blend. If the supernatural be reduced to the level of the natural, then, too, is the natural elevated to the level of the supernatural; the two become one.

Even if some of those experiences of the race which we have been in the habit of calling "miracles" be explained upon a naturalistic basis, still will there be gain, for God, in whom we must believe, will be but the more naturally present with us.

V. *The Incomparableness of Christ.*

Under the light of modern study and research the person of Jesus Christ, his teaching and his life, have been examined as never before. He has been compared with all religious teachers and reformers. His words have been weighed beside those of Confucius and Buddha and Zoroaster. His influence has been measured with that of Moses and Mahomet. His system of truth has been tested almost word by word with the philosophies of Greece and Germany. But in all of these comparisons and investigations Jesus and the religion which he so simply enunciated stand forth supreme, unapproached.

Perhaps in some quarters, under the impulse and inspiration of the Higher Criticism, the deity of Christ has been somewhat impaired,—it has not in my mind; I mention it for the sake of fairness,—but even in those quarters the incomparable character of Jesus Christ as man and teacher remains unchallenged. The Higher Criticism but makes the uniqueness of Christ more apparent than ever before. And to

this conclusion the scholarship of the world renders a verdict intelligent, because of its research.

VI. *A Unity of the Church which is Approaching through a Unity of Scholarship.*

The Higher Critics become impatient sometimes with those who, though ignorant of their methods and spirit, yet denounce them, but toward each other these same critics are courteous, patient, and teachable. They will listen to any one who has used the historical method and can furnish even a fragment of information or of explanation. Such men are found now in increasing numbers in every land and in every church. They constitute a kind of brotherhood of sympathy and respect.

No scholarly man to-day—scarcely an intelligent man—counts that he or the denomination with which he is connected has attained to the entire body of truth; other men and other denominations have at least a part; and all are ready to learn of the others. This in fact is the spirit of the historical method carried from the study of problems past into a recognition of problems and conditions present. Truth is now known

to be too large to fit into a single phrase, or to be framed within the compass of a single creed. With this method, yet without final formulated conclusions and without an organization, there exists in every communion members of this universal brotherhood—the order of the Higher Criticism.

And what now shall be said of those critics who, employing the same methods, destroy the foundations of faith and overthrow structures of conviction and confidence most precious, with nothing to offer for the places thus devastated? There are such. But there are always persons who use the most serviceable instrument for harm and hurt. Such persons must not be allowed to bring discredit upon those who act wisely and render valuable service to men. The method may be abused but, despite wrong use and still worse misunderstandings and misrepresentations, it has vindicated its value by its contributions already made to vital faith and vital piety. While it may reconstruct, it also establishes and defends.

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